

BARRIER-BREAKING WITNESS (Leader's Guide)

Acts 9:43-10:35

OPENING QUESTION

When have you felt separated from people because of cultural and ethnic differences?

CONTEXT

Jesus commanded His followers to spread the good news about Him worldwide, but the early believers remained in their Jewish communities until persecution forced them to scatter (1:8, 8:1). As they resettled, they planted new churches. (8:31). The Apostle Peter gradually moved outward from Jerusalem to visit these new churches (8:14–25; 9:31–42; cf. 8:1). One thing to note before reading the passage is that Cornelius is a centurion in the Roman army. He is not a Jew, but a Gentile. However, he was a man who loved God. Simon the tanner was a Jew but he worked with dead animals that were considered unclean. (Lev. 11:39-40). Most Jews avoided tanners and they were considered outcasts among the Jews.

READ ACTS 9:43-10:35

DISCUSS

1. Peter's staying with the tanner (a person who takes animal skins and turns them into leather) in Joppa (a more ethnically diverse area). What does it say about Peter that he is staying with Simon the tanner?

Leader Note	<i>This is likely a sign that Peter is becoming more open to the people on the fringe. Remember Peter was a Jew and taught the law, so his staying with a Jew who was an outcast shows us how Peter's heart must have been growing and that he must have been realizing that the Gospel is for all people.</i>
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- The text refers to Cornelius as a religious, devoted, generous, respected, and sincere “God-fearer” (vv. 1-4). Why do you think God picked Cornelius, a Gentile, for this assignment? What does this tell us about our God?

Leader Note	<i>Cornelius was not a Jew, so God choosing to use him shows us that God wants the Gospel to be for all people, not just the Jews. It says a lot that God would choose to use a Gentile so early on in the building of the church. It also shows us that from the very beginning of building his church, God had the Gentiles in mind.</i>
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- In verse 2, Cornelius and his family are called “God-fearers.” What does a God-fearer look like today? Do you know people in your life who fit this description? How can you grow to be more “God-fearing”?
- In Acts 10:11-12, God gives Peter a very significant dream that contains images of both kosher and non-kosher animals. Then God tells Peter to kill and eat. Peter’s response in verse 14 is one of shock. He can’t imagine eating something that in the past has been categorized as unclean. God speaks in verse 15 and says, “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.” What do you think God is beginning to teach Peter here; how is He shaping Peter?

Leader Note	<i>The idea that God could use Gentiles would have been entirely new to Peter. God was expanding Peter’s mind and heart before the Gentiles even arrived at his home.</i>
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- At what different points do you see Peter’s heart for the Gentiles grow? How is Peter a work in progress?

REFLECT

- The vision of the sheet didn’t happen once, it happened three times. God was getting Peter’s attention. He was laying the groundwork for growing Peter’s heart for the lost. It is important that we pay attention to what God keeps bringing back into our lives. What opportunities keep presenting themselves to you? What challenges keep tugging at your heart? Or—another way to

think about it—what people does God keep putting in your path? God often persists when He has a plan. God was persistent with Peter. Is God being persistent with you regarding anything in your life right now?

2. I'm inspired by Peter and Cornelius' obedience. God called both of them to do something that was way out of their comfort zones, one could even argue He called each of them to do something bizarre. When you think about your life right now as a graduate student, is there anything you are sensing God is calling you to do where obedience feels hard, maybe even bizarre? What does or would your continued obedience look like? As you read this story, what encourages you about either Peter's obedience, Cornelius' obedience, or both?

3. Later in the story Cornelius and his family become believers and are baptized. Peter sees the spiritual transformation of Gentiles. Peter's view of who God would call him to share the message of Christ with was limited before this encounter. It took a vision from God to change his thinking. Sometimes we can fall into similar thinking and assume that God wouldn't call us to share the Gospel with someone radically different than us. Who on your campus or even more specifically in your field of study, do you think God might be challenging you to share His Gospel with? What might be your first step?

PRAY

Ask God to open our eyes and hearts where they have been closed. Pray that we see people as the Lord sees them, as beloved by God and in need of Jesus, and for opportunities to share the gospel.